

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : Sir, no other business can be more important than the duty to be present here when the Minister is required to answer the question. I wish the hon. Minister had not referred to that. An unconditional apology should be given to the House. Although I had the privilege of being invited, I do not know why he has not got the invitation. But since you had announced that you would make a reference to that in the House, I thought it was my duty as a leader of my party to be present here when the hon. Speaker would make an announcement so that our involvement is also expressed. The hon. Minister should have decided that the House was more important. The time was fixed at 10 A.M. Nobody could be present here by 11 A.M. when such an event was taking place. If there was an error of judgement, it has been an unfortunate error of judgement. There should have been no occasion to make such an error. Therefore, in future the Government as a whole should convey their unconditional apology and do not give any explanation. The minister made a mistake and he should say that he owes an apology to the House.

SHRI I.K. GUJRAL : Sir, I entirely endorse what my hon. friends has said. I have said and I repeat it again that I tender an apology to this House and to you, Sir, for this slip on my part... (Interruptions).

MR. SPEAKER : I think it is enough. I would like to join the House that no reasons can be a valid reason for the absence of a Minister in the House. I think the Government will keep it in mind in future. Shri Gujral has apologised, the question can now be put

[Translation]

Agreements with France

*347. SHRI SHIVRAJ SINGH CHAUHAN :
SHRIMATI SHEELA GAUTAM :

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) the areas in which bilateral agreements are being made with France in regard to Science, technology, trade and other related subjects;

(b) whether any new areas have been identified for mutual collaboration; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

[English]

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL) : (a) A bilateral agreement on cooperation in Science and Technology has been in existence from July 1978. A revised agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation was signed in 1992. A Bilateral investment Protection Agreement was initialled in July 1995. A Financial Protocol was signed in January 1996. MOUs or Protocols are in existence on cooperation in specific sector including mines, coal, agriculture, energy,

ocean, Science and technology, petrochemicals, fertilizers, drugs, environment, water management, and railways

(b) and (c). Economic co-operation with France is developing satisfactorily. Trade and industry in both countries are active in exploring new areas of co-operation. Their efforts have the support of both Governments.

[Translation]

SHRI SHIVRAJ SINGH : Mr. Speaker, Sir, France is one of the biggest investors of the world. During last few years foreign investment have increased in our country but the French investments have decreased. In 1991, the French investment was 3.7 percent of the total investment but now it has reduced to 0.48 percent. I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to what are the reasons for decreasing the investment of France in our country besides the fact that in 1995 the then Prime Minister, Shri Narasimha Rao visited France alongwith a delegation of high officers and business men? Besides that, a talk was going on with the French Government on an agreement to prevent the trafficking of drugs and psychotroic substance. So I would like to know from the hon. Minister, Whether such agreement has been signed and if so, the details thereof?

[English]

SHRI I.K. GUJRAL : Sir, I am sorry that I did not really grasp the pith of the question. Is my hon. friend asking me whether we have a special agreement with France regarding some spices or something?

[Translation]

SHRI SHIVRAJ SINGH : Mr. Speaker Sir, with a view to check terrorism and the trafficking of drugs and psychotroic substances a talk was going on with the French Government. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether such agreement has been signed and if so the detail thereof?

[English]

SHRI I.K. GUJRAL : No, Sir, for the time being there is no such agreement.

[Translation]

SHRI SHIVRAJ SINGH : Mr. Speaker, Sir, India requires more investments in such fields in which France has acquired expertise such as the fields of electricity, transport, communication, roads and urban services etc. So, I would like to know the efforts being made by the Government to have more investments of France in these sectors? Besides that, India has also been exporting many traditional good such as cosmetic, leather goods, textile etc. to France for many years. So I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to what steps are being taken by the Government to increase the exports of such traditional Indian goods?

[English]

SHRI I.K. GUJRAL : Sir, so far as the imports and exports are concerned and what textiles we are exporting and what we are importing etc., I would request my hon. friend to direct his question to the Ministry of Commerce. They will be able to give him the answer.

So far as the investments are concerned, France has been investing more in this country and the investments have increased. There is no doubt about that. So far as the judicial matters are concerned, these were taken up for negotiation. But they have not been concluded as yet.

[Translation]

SHRI SHIVRAJ SINGH : Sir, the investments of France has decreased to a great extent during last some years. In 1991 it was 3 percent but it has gone down in 1995. So I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to why this investments have decreased.

[English]

SHRI I.K. GUJRAL : Sir, the investments have increased. I may not be in a position to tell just now, straightway whether the trade has gone down or gone up. If my hon. friend wishes that I should respond to it, he may kindly give me a separate notice. So far as the investments of France in this country are concerned, they have increased.

MR. SPEAKER : Question No. 351 - Shri Sanat Kumar Mandal - Absent.

Shri George Fernandes - He is here.

(Interruptions)

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : Sir, where is the Minister of Human Resource Development? There is a question for him. What is happening?... (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Even the Minister of Human Resource Development is not here ! Fortunately, the Members were not present.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH AFFAIRS AND SPORTS IN THE MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI DHANUSKODI ATHITHAN R.) : Sir, I am here.

MR. SPEAKER : Yes, the Minister of State is here. I am sorry. Shri George Fernandes may ask the question.

Diversion of Brahmaputra

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*351. SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES :

SHRI SANAT KUMAR MANDAL :

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether attention of the Government has been

drawn to the news-item captioned "China's 'explosive' designs on Brahmaputra" which appeared in the "Economic Times" dated November 18, 1996;

(b) if so, the fact of the matter reported therein and the reaction of the Government thereto;

(c) whether the Government have taken up this matter with China;

(d) if so, the response of China thereto;

(e) whether the Government have studied the implications of Chinese project on the lives and environment of North-Eastern States; and

(f) if so, the details thereof and the steps proposed to be taken in pursuance thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d). The news report entitled "China's 'explosive' Design on Brahmaputra" carried by the "Economic Times" dated 18 November, 1996 is based on the article in the June, 1996 issue of the Scientific American (a US journal). This article quotes a US expert, belonging to an NGO, that Chinese engineers may have prepared a concept paper of using peaceful nuclear explosions (PNEs) for a project to build a 20 kilometre channel through a mountain range for diverting water of Brahmaputra river.

China subsequently, revised its position on PNEs. It announced a moratorium on the conduct of nuclear explosions on 29th July, 1996, and signed the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) on 24 September, 1996, which prohibits PNEs and provides for a review on the utility of the PNEs after 10 years, if there is a consensus among the States Parties of the CTBT.

(e) and (f). Do not arise

[Translation]

SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES : Mr. Speaker, Sir, this article appeared in the Scientific American Journal in June, 1996, so, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether our Government have since taken up this matter with the Chinese Government or not. Recently our Prime Minister met his Chinese counterpart and Chinese President was also here on a state visit. Recently our Prime Minister visited Rome in connection with a conference of food but there he made some other commitments to his Chinese counterpart. Sir, this matter is related to our future and our security. So I would like to ask whether Indian Government have taken up this matter with the Chinese Government after this matter appeared in the journal?

[English]

SHRI I.K. GUJRAL : Sir, my hon. friend has raised three issues in one question. One question is about our policy regarding Tibet. I think the policy of India regarding Tibet is known. Therefore, the question of our